

What to do with Shapes

Why shapes? Children do not have to master shape concepts before they are three. Through everyday activities, you can reinforce the concept of line, angle, shape. Since observation and play are pathways to learning for your baby and toddler, do not hesitate to name, show examples, and problem solve with all the different shapes you come across during daily routines.

Birth to Twelve Months – Goal is exposure, body movement – experiential shapes.

- Start with the basics: circle, triangle, square.
- What rounded edges of furniture or play forms do you have where your child can experience the shape of a circle? (The *Boppy* hugging around the body, sitting in a big bucket... How about rides in a laundry basket with a rectangular bottom?) How can you make learning about shapes a *whole-body* experience?
- Choose books with one item (shape) on each page with high contrast colors for easy identification.
- Notice your child’s interests: Many children like to sing *Twinkle Twinkle*; the star is often an identifiable shape. Maybe they see hearts in a favorite book and they point to the heart on their pajamas; add that shape as one to talk about in different settings. Follow your child’s lead.
- Your child will be exploring so much with her mouth- she is learning about angles, smooth ridges, rough edges... the basics of shape! If you are choosing a rattle or a teether, look for ones with rings and shape forms.
- When a toy is chosen which has different shapes, casually label it. “Your block is a triangle.” “Round ball,” “We made a circle.”
- Stacking rings onto a post may be difficult at this age but exploring those rings with the mouth is a great first activity for learning about shapes.

1-2 years - Goal is refining fine motor grasp and emerging hand-eye coordination.

- Continue to label shapes in all different settings. Be consistent with my turn, your turn in play, “I pick the round ball. Circle!” Your turn. “You have the square!”
- Introduce puzzles with two to four single forms, with simple shapes. Narrate the actions, “Match shape.” “Star.” “Wiggle wiggle turn.” Celebrate. “Yay! You put the circle in!”
- Refine placing stacking rings on a post, model and encourage toward the big circle first, etc. Most rings will go on in random order still.
- Food is motivating. Compare circle crackers and square crackers.
- Model sorting and matching - take a pile of blocks with all kinds of shapes and take out all the circles, all the squares, etc. Freeplay how to make designs with the shapes.

2-3 years – Expand to pretend play, connect with new environments

- Model and guide your child to use a square, rectangle, circle combination to guide your child to make a construction paper truck. Add a circle light. Make it like a vehicle toy your child has. Connect. “I see round wheels on the truck. These are circles.”
- Play an I spy game anywhere and everywhere. Where do you see circles (square, rectangle)?
- Point out shapes in everyday pictures, objects. “A house has a triangle for a roof!” “Snowman has a square hat, round balls for the body, a long triangle carrot nose.”
- Notice shapes in nature. “What shape is the moon tonight?” “The berries are round.”
- A child will work toward correctly stacking rings in order by size. Shape sorter boxes – start with the easy sizes (put your hand over the others) and add shapes. Give a balance of free play and guidance for the “right” fit.
- Your child is getting into pretend play. During kitchen play, show how the pan is round and the toast is square, etc.

